

# Call of the Canyon

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JANUARY 1, 2008

## Winter Calendar of Events

### New Year Reflections Hike

Join us for a 2.5-mile round-trip hike and take this opportunity to reflect individually on the passing of the old year and the entrance of the new. Space is limited. Registration required.

**Saturday, January 5, 2008**  
**10:00 to 11:30 a.m.**

### Cinder Cone Hike

Learn about volcanoes and the volcanic activity responsible for the lava flows in the park. Hike to the top of the Snow Canyon cinder cone during this 1.5-mile round-trip hike. Space is limited. Registration required.

**Saturday, January 19, 2008**  
**10:00 to 11:30 a.m.**

### Nature Sketching

Have you ever wondered where life was going in such a hurry? Slow the rush; take time to look around and absorb your surroundings. Bring pencil and paper—all may express themselves, regardless of previous artistic experience. Space is limited. Registration required.

**Saturday, February 2, 2008**  
**1:00 to 2:00 p.m.**

### Snow Canyon Geology

From volcanic activity and lava flows to petrified sand dunes—learn the basics of Snow Canyon geology with guest geologist, Boma Johnson. Activity includes a 1.5-mile round-trip hike and

shuttling, carpooling encouraged. Space is limited. Registration required.

**Saturday, February 16, 2008**  
**1:00 to 2:00 p.m.**

### Lava Tubes Tour

Join park staff for a 2-mile round-trip hike and the chance to explore the unique formations of a lava tube. Space is limited. Registration required.

**Saturday, March 1, 2008**  
**10:00 to 11:30 a.m.**

*All listed events are free and open to the public. Program registration is from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the two days preceding the scheduled event. Please register by phone or in person. For more information or to register for a program contact park staff at (435)628-2255.*

## Stories in Stone

**ge·ol·o·gy** *The scientific study of the origin, history, and structure of the solid matter of a celestial body.*

It's hard not to be impressed when you first enter Snow Canyon State Park. Unlike most places throughout the U.S. the rock layers are spread before your eyes in brilliant colors, formations, shapes, and sizes. There is no need to scrape, dig, tunnel, or blast. Towering sandstone cliffs in red and white, peaks and valleys of jumbled black lava rock, and sand filled washes are a visual feast. However, the geology of the canyon is about more than pretty rock – it is about a story in stone.

Deciphering this story, i.e. the geology, doesn't need to be scary or intimidating. In its simplest form geology speaks of origin, history, and structure. And for those visitors who take the time to slow down, look around, and absorb their surroundings they can be transported through time.

There are two major types of rock visible in Snow Canyon – sandstone (sedimentary) and basalt (igneous). Each of these rock types has its own color, hardness, and composition, based on the environment when it was created.

The oldest visible layer dates back 190 million years to a

cool, moist climate of rivers and marshes. The second oldest layer, 183 million years old, arose from an arid desert covered by a sea of sand. At 10,000 years old, the youngest layer of rock hints at heat, gas, and molten rock forced from deep within the earth. Compression, uplift, and jointing are just a few pieces of the history shaping what we see today.

The story of this place is ongoing. Rainstorms and flash floods continue to erode,

sculpt and shape; windstorms continually reconfigure unstable surfaces; gravity is always at work putting rock and soil “in its place.”

Join us this winter as we help decipher the geology of Snow Canyon. You don't need to be a pro to begin to understand the processes at work and become transported by the stories in stone.



*Sandstone and Ice*, by Maria Werner  
—one example of ongoing erosion.

## Snow Canyon State Park

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### Utah State Parks:

*Providing opportunities to enhance the quality of life by preserving natural, cultural, and recreational resources for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.*

## Species Spotlight: The Mountain Lion

With shorter days and colder nights, winter can bring a more elusive inhabitant to the Canyon. Occasionally, observant hikers in the White Rocks area may happen upon large, softly padded prints that reveal the quiet, stealthy passage of a mountain lion (*Felis concolor*).

During cooler months, as deer move down from higher elevations to feed in the foothills, so does the mountain lion follow. Also called cougar, panther or puma, the mountain lion is a member of the cat family, Felidae. Larger than a German shepherd, the male lion averages 145 pounds, while the female weighs about 120. From gray to cinnamon—the mountain lion is often described

as tawny with a whitish underside; ears and tail tipped in black.

More than half the length of its body, the tail assists in balance and agility.

At one time, mountain lions ranged in all of the lower 48 states within suitable habitats, as well as Canada and Mexico. Today, however, mountain lions are mostly found in western North America. Residing throughout Utah, especially where prey (primarily mule deer) is abundant, mountain lions prefer pinyon-juniper and pine-oak habitats, as well as rocky cliffs, ledges and tall trees for cover. Their dens are usually in caves, but will dwell in any rock crevice, brush pile or secluded area that gives natural shelter.

Breeding can occur year-round, but in Utah more kittens are born in the fall coinciding with greater concentrations of mule deer on their winter range. Mountain lions can have up to six kittens, but the average litter is three. The kittens are born with spots. Serving as camouflage, they help keep them hidden for their first two months. The spots begin to disappear until at around one year of age they are spotless (kittens stay with their mother for 12 to 20 months).

Mountain lions are highly skilled hunters. Critical for success is their exceptional eyesight, which includes both daytime and nighttime (or nocturnal) vision. As they hunt primarily at dawn and dusk, their nocturnal vision requires extra large pupils to gather light. To protect their eyes during the bright light of day, their pupils contract to a vertical slit or “cat’s eye”. In addition, excellent depth perception allows them to attack prey with extreme accuracy.

Mountain lions and other large predators have a valuable job of keeping balance in the natural world—weeding out sick, injured and young animals so that healthy animals can thrive. As well, they keep prey populations “in check” so that deer, rabbits and other animals don’t over multiply and consume all their food sources; which then leaves even healthy animals to starve.

Mountain lions are usually very shy and attempt to avoid humans, however with encroaching developments and overall loss of habitat, they may occasionally wander into cities or areas where they come in contact with people. Occasional tracks and small clues give notice that a mountain lion is in the area. Like the domestic housecat, the mountain lion shares the habit of covering its scat with earth. These “scratchings” are distinctive signs of their presence. In the rare instance one is sighted, contact is usually made to the Division of Wildlife Resources.

Most often, like a phantom, the mountain lion skillfully evades notice as it passes quietly through the landscape—capturing our imaginations with its mystery and feline grace.



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